

VZCZCXRO2712
RR RUEHLMC
DE RUEHAR #2087/01 2491601
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 061601Z SEP 06 ZDK
FM AMEMBASSY ACCRA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 2327
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUCPDOC/USDOC WASHDC 0611
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORP

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ACCRA 002087

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TREASURY FOR LUKAS KOHLER
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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: ECON EPET GH PGOV PHUM

SUBJECT: POLITICAL-ECONOMIC HIGHLIGHTS IN GHANA:
JULY-AUGUST, 2006

REF: ACCRA 1072

¶1. This cable covers noteworthy political and economic highlights in July-August, 2006. Topics covered in this cable are:

- West African Political Parties Meet
- Whistleblower Bill Passed
- Renewed Violence in Yendi
- Human Rights Roundtable
- DHRF Signing Ceremony
- Self Help Signing Ceremony
- Government Decreases Price of Petroleum

WEST AFRICAN POLITICAL PARTIES MEET

¶12. On July 28, the Institute for Economic Affairs, a Ghanaian think tank, convened government and opposition political party representatives from eight West African countries) reportedly the first-ever such meeting. The goal of the gathering was to promote democratic dialogue, especially in neighboring Cote d'Ivoire and Togo. Before leaving Accra, the delegation issued a communique in which the various representatives pledged to work together for democracy. The President of Togo's Chief of Staff was notable for his active participation in the session. The group, after conferring with their respective party headquarters, will meet again to select a steering committee, which will assume leadership for the so-called West African Regional Political Parties Platform.

WHISTLEBLOWER BILL PASSED

¶13. Parliament on July 27, 2006 passed a Whistleblower Bill, which establishes a procedure for individuals to disclose information that relates to illegal conduct or practice. It provides protection against victimization of persons who make these disclosures and it creates a fund to compensate individuals making the disclosures. Passage of the bill is an important step in strengthening GOG anti-corruption efforts, although implementation will be key.

RENEWED VIOLENCE IN YENDI

¶4. On August 25, security personnel in Yendi, Northern Region, shot at a group of Abudu youths attempting to forcibly occupy the Andani Ya Na's Palace. According to media reports, the violence resulted in three civilian deaths and an unknown number of injuries. (Note: the Abudus and Andanis are competing &gates8, or lines of succession, within the Dagbon ethnic group in northern Ghana. End Note.)

The palace has not been occupied since March 2002 following the murder of the Andani Ya Na chief and forty others. The long-delayed burial of the Andani Ya Na in April raised hopes that the region would return to peace (reftel). Abudus attribute this recent confrontation to the undue delay in performing the final funeral rites of Muhammadu Abdulai, the Abudu Ya Na chief who died and was buried in the late 1980s. Unlike in previous years, security personnel and government representatives in the region appear determined to deal firmly with any act which might spark renewed violence between the Andanis and Abudus. The Asantehene (Ashanti King) has also quickly stepped in to reduce tensions.

HUMAN RIGHTS ROUNDTABLE

¶5. Post hosted its second annual Human Rights Roundtable on August 3, 2006. Guests included representatives from NGOs, civil society and government. Discussion was focused on the 2006 Trafficking in Persons Report, 2005 Human Rights Report and 2005 International Religious Freedom Report. Post received insight and feedback on the reports that included new information on issues like prison conditions, trafficking

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in persons and religious freedom in schools.

DHRF SIGNING CEREMONY

¶6. Ambassador hosted a Democracy and Human Rights Fund signing ceremony on August 16. Ambassador's remarks about the achievements and continuing challenges of human rights in Ghana were widely covered by the media. She praised passage this year of the Disabilities Act and progress in resolving the chieftaincy dispute in Dagbon, Northern Region. There were eight grants awarded this year, totaling \$80,000. Ambassador also signed an Economic Support Fund (ESF) grant given for a trafficking awareness campaign for fishing villages in the Kpandu District, Volta Region.

SELF HELP SIGNING CEREMONY

¶7. The Ambassador participated in a ceremony on August 28, attended by press, in which she distributed the first tranche of Special Self Help checks for each of the 11 projects being supported in Ghana this year, totaling \$70,000. The projects are geographically distributed throughout the country and support a broad range of projects, including a women's livestock group, a vocational training center, and a school water project.

GOVERNMENT DECREASES PETROLEUM PRICES

¶8. On August 2, the GOG reduced the prices of several petroleum products by eliminating one of eight taxes. Due to this decrease, gasoline now sells at 8,970 cedis per liter instead of 9,369 cedis per liter. The decision to eliminate the tax was largely a political response to heavy criticism, some coming from within the governing party, of the July 20 decision to increase prices. However, the benefits of the

lower prices will be limited mainly to those who own private vehicles. The cost of public transport, upon which the majority of the population depends, was raised between five and ten percent in the wake of the July 20 price increases and is not being reduced.

BRIDGEWATER